

25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
29 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS NOT AUTHORIZED

25X1

TOP SECRET

Page Denied

29 March 1965

HIGHLIGHTS

The bloc is continuing its efforts to raise the spectre of a major war if the US military pressure on the DRV persists. Peiping says, in this regard, that the US is now planning direct military attacks against Communist China. For its part, Hanoi quotes 6,000 regrouped Southerners as ready to return to the South and "take up arms." Meanwhile, the US air attacks on the North Vietnamese radar system achieved a notable success today when navy planes virtually destroyed a radar installation in the northern Tonkin Gulf.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

The general lull in Viet Cong terrorist and military activity continues throughout South Vietnam, while large-scale government operations failed to make any significant contact with guerrilla units. Late press reports, however, claim a heavy Viet Cong mortar attack on a government outpost in Quang Tri Province adjacent to the DRV border (Para. 1). ARVN search-and-destroy operations in Chuong Thien, Tay Ninh, and Quang Nam provinces have achieved generally favorable results (Para. 4).

25X1

25X1

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

The Buddhist hierarchy has issued a warning to Buddhist youth members against pacifist propaganda, in an apparent follow-through on its stated opposition to peace movements (Para. 2). Noting pressure from the Quat government and Buddhist leaders for greater psychological exploitation of the air strikes in the North, the US Mission now recommends initiation of leaflet drops above the 17th parallel (Para. 3). The government also plans to revitalize its central pacification organization and its guidance to the provinces (Para. 4).

25X1

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
US aircraft inflicted severe damage in a restrike against the radar installation at Bach Long Island today. Heavy ground fire was encountered and three aircraft were lost (Para. 1).

25X1
25X1

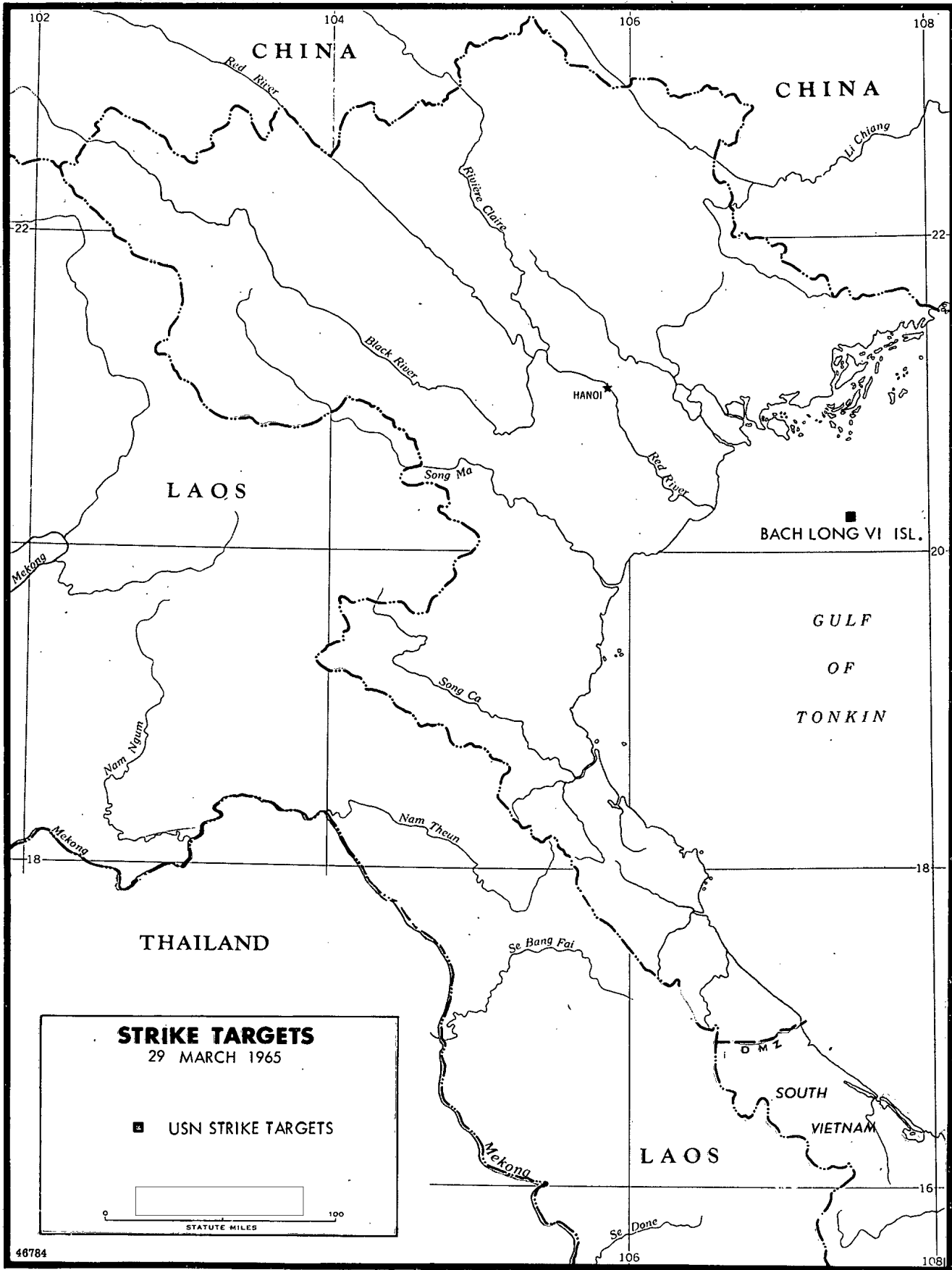
IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
No Communist military movements related to the situation in Vietnam have been detected today.

V. Communist Political Developments: The Chinese Communists have introduced a new theme into their propaganda, claiming that the US is now preparing for military attacks directly on China (Para. 1). Bloc propaganda assertions about the possible use of volunteers in South Vietnam, meanwhile, have been carried mainly in North Vietnam during the last few days; according to Hanoi, 6,000 regrouped Southerners in the DRV have declared their "readiness" to return South and "take up arms" (Para. 4). North Vietnamese charges that the US Navy attacked a Lebanese merchant ship in the Tonkin Gulf on 21 March are a pure fabrication (Para. 6).

VI. Other Major Aspects: The French say they are currently taking no action with the Communists in the Vietnamese crisis (Para. 1).

25X1
25X1

NORTH VIETNAM



25X1

I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The general lull in Viet Cong - initiated terrorist and military activity continues throughout South Vietnam. However, according to late press reports, a heavy mortar attack today on a government militia outpost, 17 miles from the North Vietnamese border, killed 24 defenders and wounded five. Large-scale government operations during the lull have failed to make any significant contact with guerrilla units.

2. Of the 63 Communist-initiated incidents listed in MACV's military report for 27 March, six of them occurred during the reporting period. Only one armed attack was listed; the remainder of the actions primarily concerned acts of terrorism, harassment, and sabotage.

3. No current actions were reported within the I Corps. In the II Corps, an unknown number of Viet Cong attacked a new life hamlet in Pleiku Province defended by Regional and Popular Forces soldiers, with government losses listed as eight KIA, five WIA, and three MIA, along with 14 weapons. Three additional new life hamlets were entered and harassed in Pleiku and Phu Bon provinces. An undetermined number of civilians were kidnaped and a significant number of weapons seized in the process. Delayed reporting for 26 March states that the 102nd Regional Forces company in Kontum Province was ambushed by the Viet Cong, losing five KIA, seven WIA, ten MIA, and several weapons including one 60-mm. mortar. Within the III Corps, Communist guerrillas placed small arms harassing fire on a government outpost in Hau Nghia Province. In IV Corps, two posts were shelled in Chuong Thien Province.

4. Government operations of battalion strength or larger increased on 27 March from 16 to 20, with 12 initiated and 11 terminated. A large-scale ARVN search-and-destroy operation initiated in Chuong

Thien Province on 25 March was favorably terminated on 27 March, with Viet Cong losses listed as 12 KIA, 23 PWs, 9 weapons, and considerable stockpiles of rice, ammunition, and explosives. ARVN forces, representing elements of two battalions, suffered three KIA and 16 WIA. In Tay Ninh Province, a government operation begun on 27 March to locate and destroy the 490th and 840th Viet Cong main force battalions has resulted in the discovery by ARVN forces of 530 25-pound mines in three guerrilla arms dumps. During the initial stages of the operation, VNAF Skyraiders mistakenly bombed and strafed the wrong area and hit a unit of the ARVN 9th Regiment, resulting in friendly personnel casualties of one KIA and 11 WIA. Unconfirmed press reports state that two battalions of South Vietnamese troops killed five Viet Cong and took 30 prisoners in an operation yesterday in Quang Nam Province, 10 miles southwest of Da Nang.

5. Company-size or smaller operations conducted on 27 March declined to 1,943. Only eight contacts were made with the Viet Cong, none of which produced significant results.

6. The level of over-all USAF/VNAF activity generally decreased in most areas, except for logistic and medical evacuation tasks. Results from American and Vietnamese combat missions flown on 27 March indicate 31 Viet Cong were killed and 120 structures destroyed.

25X1

25X1

Page Denied

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam

1. No major political events have been reported in the past 24 hours.

2. The Buddhist Institute announced today--in a step forward from the decision taken at the recent Buddhist conference to discourage monk Quang Lien from continuing his peace movement--that it had issued a communiqué warning Buddhist youth not to be taken in by pacifist propaganda. The communiqué, addressed to 50,000 Buddhist youths belonging to Buddhist youth groups, is also interpreted as an endorsement of the Quat government's policy of counter-ing Communist political subversion.

3. The US Mission has recommended a program of leaflet drops north of the 17th parallel in areas of North Vietnam where air strikes have been made or are planned. The leaflets would not only warn the population to avoid military installations but would try to counter Hanoi's propaganda by explaining the purpose of the strikes and pointing out that hostilities will cease when North Vietnam decides to leave its neighbor alone. Pressure for an expanded psychological warfare program to accompany the strikes has come from both the Quat government and leading Buddhist monks who have endorsed the strikes. A limited number of leaflet drops have previously been carried out in remote parts of North Vietnam.

4. The US Mission also reports that, at the latest joint US - South Vietnamese meeting on pacification, South Vietnamese officials proposed a new overhaul of their pacification organization. A new decree would abolish the present Internal Security Council and Central Pacification Committee, setting up a new Pacification Council to centralize all programming and organization at the national level. The decree, which would bring pacification programs under the general direction of Vice Premier and Defense Minister General Thieu, would also spell out the operations of the new council and instructions for executing the program, including authority at the regional level.

II-1

25X1

5. While an encouraging step, it remains to be seen whether the Quat government will prove any more effective than its predecessors in resolving the problems of conflicting orders and lack of guidance and support from Saigon to the provinces. A less encouraging sign of improvement was a presentation at the meeting by the social welfare minister of plans for a Central Refugee Organization. The plans were uncoordinated with other ministries, failed to distinguish clearly between immediate relief and long-range disposition, and have been relegated to further study. The government's mechanism for handling the refugees has been inadequate and almost totally dependent on USOM direction.

III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. The Bach Long Island radar installation was hit again by US aircraft on 29 March. A total of 32 planes from the carrier CORAL SEA bombed the facility in two waves beginning about 1400 local Vietnam time. The Bach Long Island radar was first attacked on 26 March.

Initial bomb damage assessment of the 29 March strike against the Bach Long Island radar site indicates that the radar was totally destroyed. The communications building appears gutted, two other buildings were destroyed, and one severely damaged. Light damage was inflicted on buildings in the barracks area and moderate damage on the headquarters building. Two deeply revetted buildings, which were probably entrances to underground munitions dumps, were completely destroyed. Intense and repeated secondary explosions continued for nearly two hours after the strike in the area of the dumps. Flames and heavy smoke were still rising from the installation at the time of photography.

The attacking planes encountered severe semi-automatic weapons fire from the ground. Two F8Ds and one A4E were lost and several aircraft were damaged. One pilot has been rescued and search operations are still under way for the other two. No hostile air reaction was reported.

25X1

III-1

25X1

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. No Communist military movements related to the situation in Vietnam have been noted in the past 24 hours.

25X1

IV-1

25X1

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Chinese Communists have raised the level of their propaganda blasts against the US with warnings that the US is preparing to attack China. In a 26 March editorial, the Peiping Liberation Army Journal declared that the US intended to use South Vietnam not only "as a base to invade North Vietnam" but also "in advancing to attack the CPR." The warning was picked up in a People's Daily editorial on 29 March which asserted that following US "occupation" of South Vietnam and "aggression" against North Vietnam, "its next step will be aggression against China." These accusations appear designed to increase neutralist pressures upon the US for an end to attacks against the DRV by raising the spectre of a major and perhaps uncontrollable war if US military pressure on Hanoi continues.

2. On 29 March Peiping issued its 371st "serious warning" accusing US aircraft of engaging in "serious war and provocative acts" by flying over Chinese territorial waters west of Hainan on two occasions during the morning hours of 29 March. The Chinese did not, however, link these alleged intrusions with US air strikes later on the 29th against a DRV radar station on an island about midway between Hainan and the North Vietnamese coast.

3. Peiping was the scene on 27 March of another tough statement by the Viet Cong Liberation Front, echoing the lines of its major pronouncement on 22 March. The acting head of the Front delegation in Peiping spoke out once again on the "right" of the insurgents to "accept all kinds of assistance" from abroad, "including weapons and volunteers." He reiterated the Front's demands for US withdrawal from South Vietnam and cessation of attacks on the DRV. In view of the US air attacks against the North, he claimed the Viet Cong were determined to "strike back more vigorously" against the US in South Vietnam.

4. Hanoi, over the week end, responded rather fully to the 22 March Liberation Front call for international assistance, claiming that both the South Vietnamese regrouped to the North in 1954 as well as millions of North Vietnamese youths were "eager" to fulfill any new task assigned to them. The readiness of the regrouped southerners to return to South Vietnam was discussed in both a Fatherland Front statement on 27 March and a party daily editorial on the 28th. A rally was held in Hanoi on the 29th in which 6,000 of the southerners declared their "readiness to return to the South to take up arms."

5. Also on 29 March, the North Vietnamese Labor Youth Union estimated that 1.5 million young people had offered to join the army, fight the US, and go anywhere they were assigned. The theme of Hanoi's response was one of unity between the North and the South in the struggle against US imperialism. The editorial of 28 March asserted that the "two Vietnams speak with the same voice," and the Front statement admitted that the struggle of the people in both zones is "being more closely coordinated than ever before."

6. The North Vietnamese have now added the "intimidation" of foreign shipping into and out of North Vietnamese ports to their list of alleged US depredations in Vietnam. A DRV Foreign Ministry statement, on 29 March, rebroadcast by Peiping on the same date, charged the US with hindering freedom of movement in international waters and with an attack on a merchant ship, the Samsfar Raden, which was flying the Lebanese flag. According to the Hanoi statement, the ship was heavily damaged by US and South Vietnamese aircraft after it had called at Haiphong. Many crewmen, including Greeks, Spaniards, UAR, and British, were killed in the attack, the statement claimed.

7. In actual fact, the Samsfar Raden after leaving Haiphong entered a South Vietnamese port due to the death from natural causes of its radio operator. After taking on a new operator, it sailed again. The DRV charges about the air attack are pure fabrications apparently designed to stir up free world fears that US activities in the Tonkin Gulf and the South China Sea will interfere with international merchant shipping in that area.

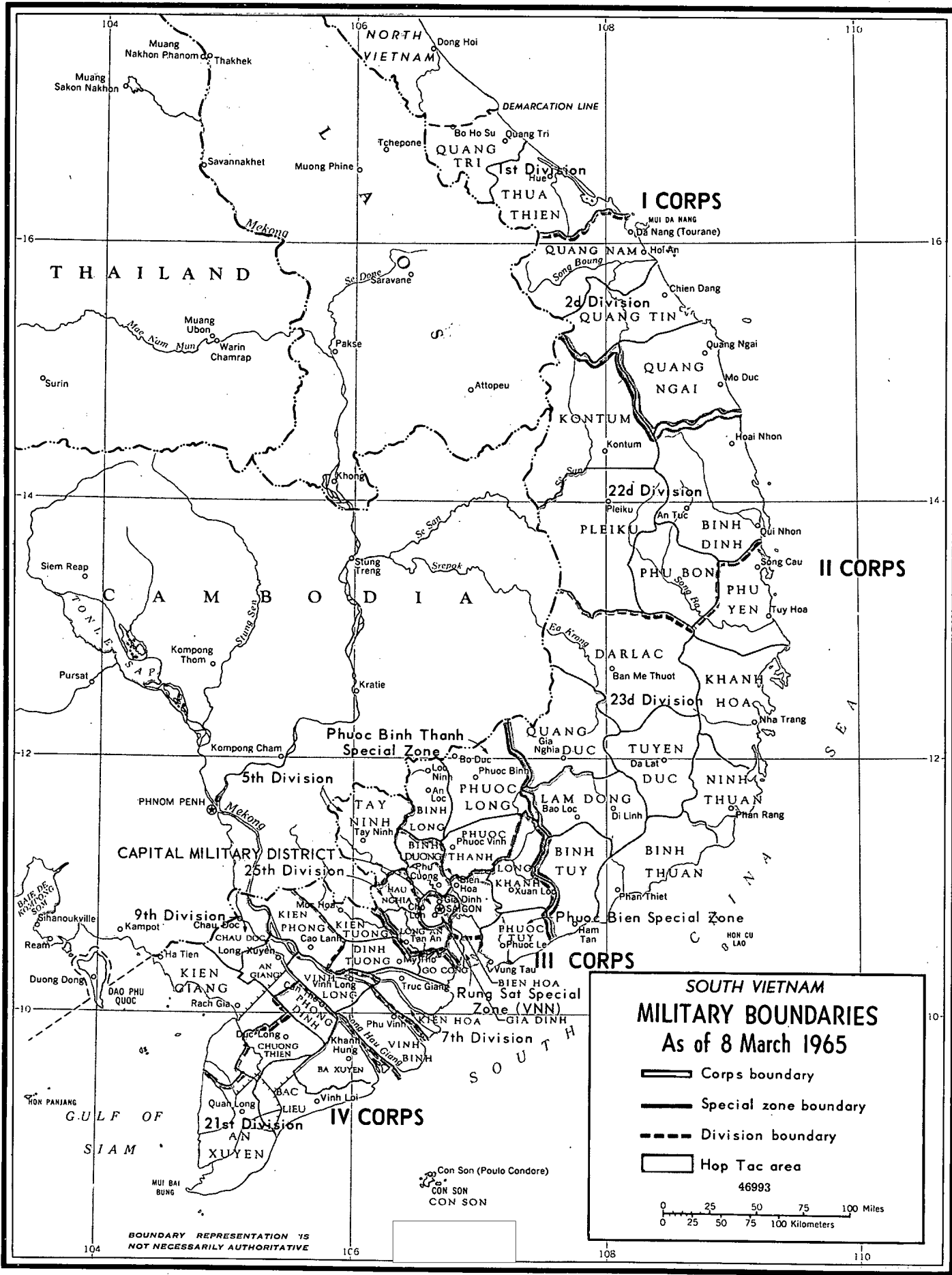
VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. The French assertedly are standing down for the present in the Vietnamese crisis. Foreign Minister Couve de Murville told US Ambassador Bohlen on 26 March that Paris had heard nothing from Peiping or Hanoi recently on Vietnam and that, for the moment, the French were undertaking nothing with the Communist side. Bohlen gained the impression that the French have also, for the time being, abandoned any hopes of eliciting a favorable reaction on a new international conference.

25X1

VI-1

25X1



25X1

~~TOP SECRET~~

TOP SECRET